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**For Immediate Release**

July 9, 2002

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**19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit to Develop Self-help Center for Pro Se Litigants**

WAUKEGAN, IL – The 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court and Prairie State Legal Services announced a sub-grant agreement in the amount of \$25,000 from the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation (IEJF) to develop a self-help center for Lake County residents who represent themselves in court as pro se litigants. The IEJF is a non-profit organization created to distribute funds across the state in accordance with the Illinois Equal Justice Act (30 ILCS 765/1 *et. seq.*) of 1999.

By law, residents may choose to represent themselves in court and serve as pro se litigants. To assist them in the legal process, the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court sought funding for a self-help center. The self-help center will be located in the Lake County Courthouse Law Library. The center will be equipped with computer work stations with access to forms and informational materials to help pro se litigants prepare and present their own cases.

“The Pro Se Center will provide forms and legal materials specifically designed to assist people involved in small claims cases who are not represented by an attorney,” stated Chief Judge Jane D. Waller. “I am pleased that we were able to secure a grant that will enable us to make our court system more accessible to our residents.”

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## **19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit – 2 of 2**

The 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court's strategic plan has included a pro se litigant, self-help center for some time. The sub-grant agreement enables Prairie State Legal Services, a group dedicated to providing high-quality legal services to low-income individuals, to disburse \$13,175 in IEJF funds to hire and train staff to assist pro se litigants in using the center.

Bonnie Thomson Carter, Chairman of the Lake County Board's Law and Judicial committee explained, "The judicial system can be intimidating to residents who have little to no experience in court. This program is a people-friendly way to guide residents through the judicial system."